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RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 2763
RUEHMD/AMEMBASSY MADRID PRIORITY 5335
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TAGS: MO PBTS PHUM PREL

SUBJECT: WESTERN SAHARA: NORDICS PONDER NEXT STEPS

REF: A. RABAT 240

- 1B. RABAT 238
- 1C. RABAT 181
- 1D. RABAT 172
- 1E. RABAT 48

Classified By: Pol/C Tim Lenderking for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) Swedish and Norwegian Embassy First Secretaries Jonas Wendel and Lene Richter Strand called on Polcouns February 8 for a read-out of the embassy's late January visit to Laayoune (Refs A-D), and in turn updated Polcouns on the latest Nordic thinking on how to respond to what they view as unacceptable GOM interference in two scuttled visits to the Western Sahara. Wendel and Richter Strand were slated to be two of the three members of the Nordic delegation (the other was Finnish Charge Ingmar Strom) planning to visit the Western Sahara January 22-24. On January 21, however, MFA Director for Multilateral Affairs Mohamed Loulichki called the Swedish Ambassador in Rabat to inform him that the GOM forbade the delegation from meeting Sahrawi civil society activists. The delegation viewed this condition by the GOM as unacceptable and canceled the trip in protest.

12. (C) Polcouns gave the diplomats an overview of the latest mission visit to Laayoune, January 24-26, noting meetings with MINURSO, GOM officials, and NGO representatives from both sides of the political divide. In response to their questions, Polcouns stressed that the mission had followed the same procedures in organizing this visit as in the past, i.e. informing the GOM of the visit, identifying delegation members, and requesting assistance for official appointments via diplomatic note, while making other arrangements directly through embassy channels. When asked about the arrangements for meeting with Sahrawi activists (Ref B), Polcouns responded that we had not informed the GOM of the meeting, nor had any Moroccan official asked for an accounting of our time in the territory. (Comment: Curiously, despite the tension on the ground in Laayoune and the tempest over the aborted Nordic visit, the GOM interfered less in this particular mission visit than in any in the last several

years. No handler was assigned to shadow emboffs; while drivers from the Wali's office were assigned to emboffs, they were dismissed when not needed, and emboffs were able to travel around town on foot or by taxi, stop at local cafes, without any evident surveillance or interference. These activities appeared to generate no concern among the local officials. Emboffs were also allowed to visit Laayoune prison, something no mission has been allowed to do as far as we know. End Comment). The Nordic diplomats took copious notes during the read-out.

Moroccan Ambassadors Convoked

¶13. (C) Polcouns asked the Nordics how their governments intended to respond to the GOM's unacceptable limitations on their travel to the Western Sahara. Wendel and Richter Strand noted that their governments (the MFA's Secretary General in Sweden, the MFA's Director General in Norway) had both convoked the Moroccan Ambassadors (a charge d'affaires in the case of Norway; a new ambassador, also a Sahrawi like the previous one, has been named but has not yet arrived in Oslo) to express their disappointment with the GOM. Wendel added that individual parliamentarians in Sweden had spoken out against the action. The Nordics believed the Finnish government had also convoked the Moroccan Ambassador.

Swedish FM to Visit Morocco

¶14. (C) Wendel added that Swedish FM Freivalds is scheduled to visit Morocco on March 27, the first visit by a FM in about fifteen years. The GOS does not want the aborted Nordic assessment to mar the FM's visit (and Wendel hoped the GOM had similar interests), so the GOS was likely to re-evaluate the situation following the visit and make a call at that time on the appropriateness of trying for a third time to send an assessment mission to the Western Sahara.

Possible Action

¶15. (C) In the meantime, the Nordics were considering a separate demarche to the GOM, but also weighing that against actions the EU is contemplating on the Western Sahara. The two diplomats said that France and Spain continued to restrain EU action concerning the Western Sahara, including watering down texts that would express concern over the human rights situation. The Nordics' separate demarche would either protest GOM actions and/or demand clarification on freedom of movement for visitors to the Western Sahara. Wendel said EU members were looking at a proposal tabled by Austria that would ask the Moroccans to comment formally on reports from human rights NGOs concerning the human rights situation. The Nordics said their governments did not want any link made between the Austrian proposal and their own possible demarche. He added that a phone call from Swedish Deputy FM to the GOM, prior to the FM visit, was under consideration.

¶16. (C) Wendel added as an aside that the Islamist Party of Justice and Development had contacted several European governments, including Sweden, about the possibility of participating in a conference on autonomy to take place in Morocco, organized by the PJD, perhaps in March (Ref E). Wendel understood the Germans had also been solicited for the conference, but had told the PJD that autonomy options from Europe could include suggestions that the powers of the monarch would need to be limited, and this notion appeared to ruffle the PJD.

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